

## Reviews

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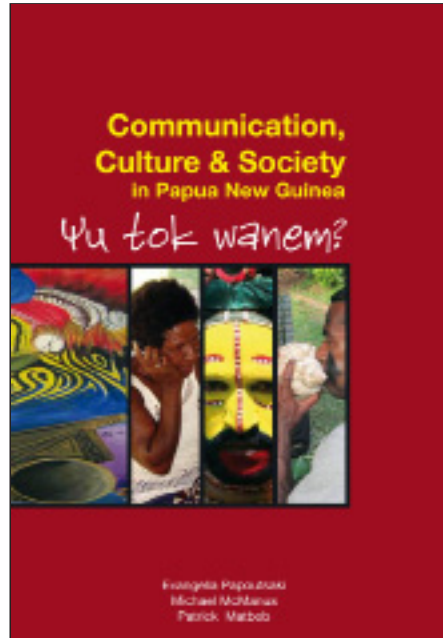
### Western media 'elite' models challenged by PNG research

***Communication, Culture and Society in Papua New Guinea: Yu Tok Wanem?***

Edited by Evangelia Papoutsaki, Michael McManus and Patrick Matbob, with a preface by David Robie. Madang, PNG: Divine Word University Press; Auckland: Pacific Media Centre. 2011, 239 pp. ISBN 978-1-877314-94-3

**M**ORE THAN 20 authors have been included in *Communication, Culture and Society in Papua New Guinea: Yu Tok Wanem?* This should surely be the book of the month on media in the Pacific.

The editors have divided the book into four themes focusing on: mainstream media issues; social issues; information gaps and development issues, and the search for solutions.



A glance at the mini-profiles of the authors show that many come from a range of PNG backgrounds, including the Highlands, Bougainville, New Ireland, Manus and East New Britain. Also represented in the book are well-known media academics from New Zealand and Australia.

Identifying media development issues and suggesting solutions in PNG is a stiff intellectual task and a hazard for any writer as the PNG national culture is so diverse and we do it a disservice to encompass it in one culture. Eight out of every ten people work in rural areas. Many villages are cut off from the next village by a mountain and a valley. There

are numerous islands. The number of individual languages in Papua New Guinea is over a thousand and these are languages, not dialects.

All teaching in schools and institutions is in one language, English, but that too creates its own problems as students struggle to understand what is being taught. It affects the training of young journalists. Amanda Watson, an Australian completing her PhD in 'Putting development into communication' notes that many tertiary students go through primary school in PNG being taught by teachers with a tenuous grasp of English. The result is that when these young university students reach the time for tertiary education their past experience of education has left them with a huge educational task as they discover that the English language 'has its meaning embedded in alien concepts' (p. 186).

Evangelia Papoutsaki, a co-editor of this book and its interesting predecessor *Media, Information and Development in Papua New Guinea*, says that one part of a solution to improve the quality of reportage is to look at the curriculum for journalism, and to amend it to focus on awareness on the social and cultural importance of local knowledge. She suggests a 'robust methodology' is required to reach this goal.

This chapter hits out at journalism that follows a Western model and reports the views of prominent elites while the views of ordinary people are excluded unless they are involved in accidents, violence or catastrophes. Part of the solution for Evangelia Papoutsaki is to encourage students to do research in their own communities. She notes that while resources may be limited for this type of research, it is seen as developing pride and confidence in students while helping to develop a critical sense about Western models of inquiry.

The work of Patrick Matbob, a journalism lecturer at Divine Word University for the last eight years, supports the ideas stressed by Evangelia Papoutsaki. His chapter shows that students engaged in research in their own communities both in PNG and the Solomon Islands do develop confidence and enhance their journalism skills.

*Yu tok wanem?*—want to talk? The answer to the question is a 'Yes', according to research conducted by Amanda Watson about the use of mobile phones in two PNG villages using a methodology of observations, a survey and Tok Pisin interviews. Those in possession of a mobile phone talked about being able to communicate with friends and relatives. The perceived benefits of the mobile

phone appeared to be the same in both villages. A negative (for parents) was their confusion and inability to monitor the behavior and friendships of their offspring.

She also found that in one of the two villages taking part in the research, nobody owned a computer or had access to the internet, while in the other village less than ten percent used a computer or the internet.

Media and big business are an important focus for Barbara Kepa, a PNG national and graduate of Divine Word University. She examines in considerable detail the relationship between the media and the mining company working at OK Tedi in the Western province. The mining project began in 1981.

Kepa shows how media played a big part in informing the citizens of the area to help them to keep up to date with progress and development of the mining company.

The company ran a media unit that produced printed information and a company radio station, Radio Fly, made programmes on business development, safety, education and mining with updates on news of the moment.

In her research, Kepa wanted to find out how the information was disseminated by the company and what communications took place

between the company, its employees and the landowners before and during development by the company. She also asked questions about the appropriateness of the information that was conveyed to the people.

What Kepa found was that while there were a number of talk mode programmes about planning sustainable futures, there was a lack of practical support. She quotes one man who said in his survey: 'Give us some training on how to start these projects, not just talk. We want action' (p. 153).

How do you design a successful media campaign on HIV/AIDS? Using media to educate tends to draw groans from radio and TV presenters, enthusiasm in media educators and unfortunately, it often creates confusion among the receivers ... the audience.

Henry Yamo's background crosses the category of teacher, writer and researcher. Trained as a Primary school teacher he moved to journalism and then to university. His findings make depressing reading but his topic is fascinating. His article examines the language of HIV/AIDS campaigns (p. 86). English and Hiri Motu are official languages of PNG. English is taught in schools but the lingua franca is Tok Pisin. To reach the masses, a media programme designed in Tok Pisin seems to guarantee the most success.

But as Yamo discovered, you can reach the people, but that is only one small step in the great education marathon. Tok Pisin language is basic and the words used for different parts of the body and sexual activity are often the same as those used in swearing, frustration or anger and are seen by some sections of the population as offensive and vulgar. While youth will have no problems with the vernacular among friends, the use of these words in the media is unsuitable as media outlets can reach all ages and all sectors of the PNG population.

The majority of the respondents said that some of the words used were inappropriate to their culture. From a religious perspective other respondents thought some of the words in the media messages were linked to sin.

On the positive side Yamo says there is sufficient information for him to conclude that more care needs to be given in designing the specified vocabulary in both written and oral messages

The chapters are well referenced and the publication has a substantial index. This admirable book serves as a worthwhile companion to earlier publications, *South Pacific Islands Communication: Regional Perspectives, Local Issues*, edited by Evangelia Papoutsaki and Ushar Sundar Harris, and *Media and Development:*

*Issues and Challenges in the Pacific Islands*, edited by Shailendra Singh and Biman Prasad, published three years ago, and an earlier book in 2004, *Mekim Nuis—South Pacific Media, politics and education*, written by David Robie.

## References

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- Robie, D. (2004). *Mekim nius: South Pacific politics, media and education*. Suva: University of the South Pacific Book Centre.
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